DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 482 861 PS 031 700

AUTHOR	Ryan, Joel; Allen, Ben
TITLE	National Head Start Association Position Paper: A Vision for Head Start and State Collaboration.
INSTITUTION	National Head Start Association, Alexandria, VA.
PUB DATE	2003-00-00
NOTE	11p.
AVAILABLE FROM	National Head Start Association, 1651 Prince Street, Alexandria, VA 22314. Tel: 703-739-0875; Fax: 703-739-0878; Web site: http://www.nhsa.org. For full text: http://www.nhsa.org/download/research/StateCollaboration.pdf.
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS
DESCRIPTORS	*Child Care; *Cooperation; Government Role; Organizations (Groups); *Partnerships in Education; Position Papers; Preschool Children; *Preschool Education; State Federal Aid; *State Government
IDENTIFIERS	Barriers to Change; Barriers to Innovation; Head Start Program Performance Standards; *National Head Start Association; *Project Head Start

ABSTRACT

Based on the view that coordinated efforts among Head Start programs, child care programs and other prekindergarten programs, and states can be enhanced without devolving Head Start and its high quality standards to the states, this position paper draws on a Bush Administration report and the Head Start Program Performance Standards to demonstrate how Head Start programs collaborate extensively with organizations affiliated with or within states. The paper further describes extant barriers to collaboration and presents a vision for improving collaboration among Head Start programs and states. Testimony from the Assistant Secretary for Children and Families is cited to demonstrate Head Start's recognition of the states' important role in formulating and implementing policies and initiatives affecting low-income children and their families and the program's emphasis on partnerships, including partnerships with local school districts and local governments. The paper excerpts from Head Start Program Performance Standards to illustrate the encouragement given to programs to collaborate with state, local, and private organizations. Barriers to collaboration include having to work with partners of lesser quality, differing eligibility requirements, and a lack of strong incentives to pool resources and to work together. Five recommendations are offered that do not involve dismantling Head Start by sending the program to the states through block grants: (1) reform and expand the training and technical assistance system; (2) develop a process for joint community assessments and recruitment; (3) establish a vehicle to blend funding; (4) expand eligibility requirements; and (5) hold every early childhood program to the highest standards. The position paper concludes by pointing out that although Head Start is currently doing an extremely good job with collaboration and cooperation, there are many ways to break down barriers to collaboration and cooperation that can significantly improve the quality of Head Start programs and improve the efficiency of service delivery

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without altering the federal-to-local structure or dismantling the remaining components of the program. (KB)

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Position Paper: A Vision for Head Start and State Collaboration

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Acknowledgements are due to the individuals who helped on this paper. Within the National Head Start Association (NHSA), thanks are due to Sarah Greene and Elizabeth Kane.

Position Paper: A Vision for Head Start and State Collaboration

Introduction

Head Start programs believe it is important to have coordinated efforts among their programs, child care programs and other pre-k programs, and in many states that is occurring. In fact, many Head Start programs provide full day services by leveraging child care subsidy funds. Some 42 percent of families who reported a need for full-day, full-year early care and education received this extended care either directly through the Head Start program or through collaborations between Head Start and child care providers.

Similarly, pre-kindergarten services often co-locate with Head Start programs to provide extended education and comprehensive health and nutrition services to a larger group of children in need. While Head Start believes that collaboration among programs is always preferable and can always be improved upon, coordination can continue to work in all early childhood programs and be enhanced without devolving Head Start, and its high quality standards, to the states.

NHSA has always known that improving collaboration and coordination with state early care programs is essential to improve efficiency and quality. This is one reason NHSA pushed for 50 state collaboration grants during the 1994 reauthorization. We believe it is now time to move forward and to tie up any loose ends in the Head Start Act so that collaboration and coordination can be strengthened.

Using a Bush Administration report and the Head Start Program Performance Standards, this position paper demonstrates how Head Start programs collaborate extensively with organizations affiliated with or within states. Moreover, this position paper describes what barriers to collaboration exist and presents a vision for improving collaboration among Head Start programs and states.

Documentation on State Collaboration

The Bush Administration has documented extensively how Head Start programs are ***already*** collaborating. In his recent testimony before the House Education and the Workforce Subcommittee on Education Reform, Dr. Wade Horn, Assistant Secretary for Children and Families, contended,

> ...despite its federal-to-local program structure, Head Start has always recognized that the states play an important role in the formulation and implementation of policies and initiatives that affect low-income children and their families. Partnerships have always been one of Head Start's highest priorities. These include partnerships with local school districts – nearly 450 of which operate Head Start programs – and local governments – 150 city and county governments operate Head Start programs.[1]

Furthermore, the Head Start Bureau in its recent 228-page report entitled, *Head Start-State Collaboration Offices*, extensively documented how Head Start programs are collaborating with states, localities, and private organizations. In this report, the Head

Start Bureau catalogued the extent of this collaboration by providing summaries for *every state* in the country.[2]

In coordination with state collaboration offices, Head Start programs collaborated with organizations in states, irrespective of whether these states have a state-funded pre-kindergarten program.

In Ohio, a state with an extensively developed pre-kindergarten program, Head Start programs and the Ohio Head Start – State Collaboration Office, have worked with Ohio's pre-kindergarten program, the Ohio Department of Education, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, the State Early Intervention Coordinating Council, the Interagency Early Childhood Team for Ohio's Help Me Grow program, the Ohio Family Literacy Initiative Task Force, the Ohio Read Alliance, the Ohio Department of Health, the Ohio Higher Education Consortium, and the Ohio Family and Children First organization.[3]

Meanwhile in Mississippi, a state without a state-funded pre-kindergarten program, Head Start programs have worked in coordination with the Mississippi Head Start-State Collaboration Office by collaborating with Mississippi's Department of Education, the Mississippi Department of Health, the Mississippi Education Television Network, the Early Childhood Institution at Mississippi State University, Mississippi's historically black universities, and school districts throughout Mississippi.[4]

How are Head Start programs able to collaborate with state, local, and private organizations? The Head Start Program Performance Standards ***already*** encourage this collaboration by specifying that Head Start programs must

- *" take an active role in community planning to encourage strong communication, cooperation, and the sharing of information among agencies and their community partners and to improve the delivery of community services to children and families."*[5]

- *" take affirmative steps to establish ongoing collaborative relationships with community organizations to promote the access of children and families to community services that are responsive to their needs, and to ensure that Early Head Start and Head Start programs respond to community needs."* In addition to local elementary schools, these community organizations include those that provide health care, family, disability, child protective, and child care services.[6]

- *"make specific efforts to develop interagency agreements with local education agencies."* The purpose of the agreements is to facilitate the participation of children with disabilities and their families with Head Start programs.[7]

- *"establish and maintain procedures to support successful transitions for enrolled children and families from previous child care programs into Early Head Start or Head Start and from Head Start into elementary school, a Title I of the*

Elementary and Secondary Education Act preschool program, or other child care settings."[8]

Barriers to Collaboration and Coordination and Five Recommendations for Improvement

As was stated earlier, NHSA and the Head Start community pushed for 50 state collaboration grants during the 1994 reauthorization. NHSA has always been at the forefront in trying to improve the collaboration and coordination of Head Start with state early care programs. We believe, however, that more can be done to improve collaboration and coordination. Some of the barriers that Head Start programs face in terms of collaboration include having to work with partners of lesser quality, differing eligibility requirements, and a lack of strong incentives to pool resources and to work together.

The following five recommendations can be accomplished without dismantling Head Start by sending the program to the states through block grants. In fact many of the changes can be easily made without any radical changes to the Head Start Act itself. We believe these recommendations will improve coordination and thus the quality of early childhood education and Head Start.

1. Reform and Expand the Training and Technical Assistance System

One reason Head Start is such a successful program is that there is a strong emphasis on training and technical assistance and quality programming. Head Start programs receive a portion of these dollars directly in order to improve their skills and to help them meet the national Program Performance Standards. Additional dollars are available for special initatives such as strengthening literacy and language skills, a national credentialing program, participating in training conferences, and involving fathers in Head Start. However, there are a few areas in which the training and technical assistance could be improved and expanded, especially as it pertains to collaboration and coordination. For example, NHSA proposes the following:

- Expand the training and technical assistance system to include all areas of the national Program Performance Standards.

- States and state Head Start Associations must be included in the planning and coordination of the training and technical assistance system. If the state provides training and technical assistance under this system to early childhood education programs, the state must provide additional funding, other than Head Start funds, to meet these needs.

- All identified state early childhood pre-k programs that collaborate and coordinate with Head Start must have an adequate review process and monitoring system in place.

- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) shall require each state to collaborate and coordinate with State Head Start Associations, and the state's collaboration office, to provide a comprehensive yearly report on the status and quality of all early care programs in their respective states. The collaborative report will be submitted to HHS who will then make that information available to the public in an easy to understand guide.

2. Develop a Process For Joint Community Assessments and Recruitment

Head Start's goal has always been to ensure that every eligible child receives a high quality early education. Right now Head Start serves only 60 percent of eligible children because of a lack of funding. Although additional funding is necessary to serve every eligible child, under-enrollment is still a problem in many states. NHSA believes that Head Start programs and their state counterparts need to better pool their resources and talents to make sure that every child that can be served in fact does get served. To make this happen we propose that Head Start programs work with state pre-k entities on joint community assessments and with recruiting eligible children. In particular we propose the following:

- Each Head Start agency shall take steps to coordinate with the local education agency servicing the community, with other entities coordinating local pre-k programs, and with schools in which children participating in a Head Start program and are operated by such agency in the following ways: recruiting children, collaborating on the shared use of transportation and facilities, and, exchanging information on the provision of non-educational services to such children.

- An annual community needs assessment shall be conducted among coordinating entities.

3. Establish a Vehicle to Blend Funding

Although Head Start is collaborating with state and federal programs across the nation, one major difficulty facing Head Start programs is merging or "blending" Head Start funds with other federal or state childcare programs. This difficulty is caused by the fact that the various programs have different eligibility requirements, different funding methods (cost reimbursement for Head Start, usually a fixed fee for each day of attendance), and different programmatic requirements (generally Head Start requires more services). Most significantly, the majority of other programs do not provide the level of funding per child that Head Start does, in many cases the funding is one half that of Head Start.

In addition, the strict cost allocation requirements of federal grants law prevent the blending of funds from other programs with Head Start to create full day programs or simply serve more children unless all of the children served are Head Start eligible. This means that children over income (beyond the 10 percent now allowed by Head Start)

cannot be served in a Head Start program unless the total cost of serving those children is fully covered by other funds. The difficulty is caused by the federal grants definition of total cost. Under the applicable cost principles, total cost must include the cost of all services and equipment regardless of whether the state program, for example, requires a particular service and regardless of whether the Head Start program would have incurred the cost in any event.

One example is the requirement under the Head Start Act that programs provide transportation. If a Head Start agency uses a bus to pick up a child who is enrolled in a state funded program operated by the agency, the agency must charge the pro rata cost of the bus service to the state program even if the seat was empty and even if the agency had to provide the service regardless of whether the state-funded child rode the bus or not.

These types of issues have resulted in, for many programs, accounting issues driving program design instead of community needs driving program design as well as a significant administrative burden on programs trying to keep all of these costs allocations straight. Our proposal would allow local Head Start programs to blend funding streams to create a broader program serving more children with higher incomes.

There are a number of benefits to this proposal. It frees programs to focus on serving more children in poverty; it allows programs to blend many funding streams to achieve economies and efficiencies from operating larger programs, and it means that the significant federal investment in Head Start over the past 35 years can be effectively leveraged to serve many more children without any increase in federal funding.

Our proposal is as follows:

- A Head Start agency may provide Head Start services to children who are enrolled in another federal or state child care program operated by the agency if the agency receives funds other than federal Head Start funds that are sufficient to pay the incremental cost of providing those services. The family income of these children must not exceed the income threshold established by each state involved under the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act of 1990. The children must meet Head Start's age eligibility requirements, and they must receive the full range of Head Start services. Federal funds shall be used to supplement and not to supplant other federal, state, and local public funds expended to provide services for eligible individuals.

4. Expand Eligibility Requirements

An alternative to our blended funding proposal is to expand eligibility. Currently, eligible children are defined as (1) children whose family income is below the "poverty line" or whose families are eligible or potentially eligible for "public assistance." In addition, HHS may prescribe by regulation a reasonable number of over income children (this number has been set at 10 percent for many years) and may provide for continuing income eligibility for the succeeding program year even if family income rises (which HHS has also done).

As the Head Start program has changed, a number of issues have arisen concerning eligibility. First, the Act provides, albeit ambiguously, that Head Start programs can only serve children from age 3 to the age of compulsory school. Apparently, only Early Head Start programs and some other programs serving special populations can serve children from 0 to 3. Second, programs serving infants must also be able to serve pregnant mothers by providing supportive serves prior to birth. Finally, the Act uses the poverty line as the income cutoff for 90 percent of enrolled children. This is an extremely restrictive definition and leaves out a significant number of needy children.

Accordingly, we propose the following:

- Allow Head Start programs to serve children from birth to the age of compulsory school attendance.

- Allow Head Start programs to expand the over-income enrollment from 10 percent to 25 percent.

5. Hold Every Early Childhood Program to the Highest Standards

Several states have voluntary school readiness performance indicators in place for state pre-k. This outcome based approach works to build some semblance of accountability into these early childhood programs. In many states Head Start programs have voluntarily agreed to meet the state school readiness performance indicators. NHSA believes that one way to continue to help align state pre-k entities with Head Start would be to require Head Start programs to participate in a state's school readiness performance measures. This would require Head Start programs and state pre-k to be on the same page in terms of literacy and language development, serve to build joint collaboration around curriculum, and ensure that there is no duplication if a child attends a state pre-k program and Head Start.

Conclusion

Head Start is currently doing an extremely good job with collaboration and coordination. In fact for many Head Start programs, they wouldn't be able to provide any of the necessary services to their children and families without collaborating and coordinating with state and federal programs. However, we believe that there are many ways to break down the barriers to collaboration and coordination that can significantly improve the quality of Head Start programs and also improve the efficiency of service delivery. These changes as outlined above can be made without altering the federal-to-local structure of Head Start or dismantling the remaining components of the Program. If you have any questions about our proposals for strengthening collaboration and coordination please contact the Government Affairs Division of NHSA at (703) 739-0875.

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[1] Horn, W. (2003, March 6). Testimony on the President's Plan to Strengthen Head Start before the Subcommittee on education Reform, Committee on Education and the Workforce, U.S. House of Representatives. Accessed at http://www.hhs.gov/asl/testify/t030306.html on April 19, 2003.

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[2] Head Start Bureau. (2002, Spring). *Head Start-State Collaboration Offices, Annual State Profiles*. Arlington, VA: National Head Start Training and Technical Assistance Resource Center.

[3] Ibid., 132-135.

[4] Ibid., 96-98.

[5] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2001). Head Start Program Performance Standards and Other Regulations, Section 1304.41(a)(1), 147.

[6] _____. (2001). Head Start Program Performance Standards and Other Regulations, Section 1304.41(a)(2), 148-150.

[7] _____U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2001). Head Start Program Performance Standards and Other Regulations, Section 1304.41(a)(4), 152.

[8] _____. (2001). Head Start Program Performance Standards and Other Regulations, Section 1304.41(c)(1), 154.

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EFF-089 (1/2003)

PS031700